The Meo of Xieng Khouang Province

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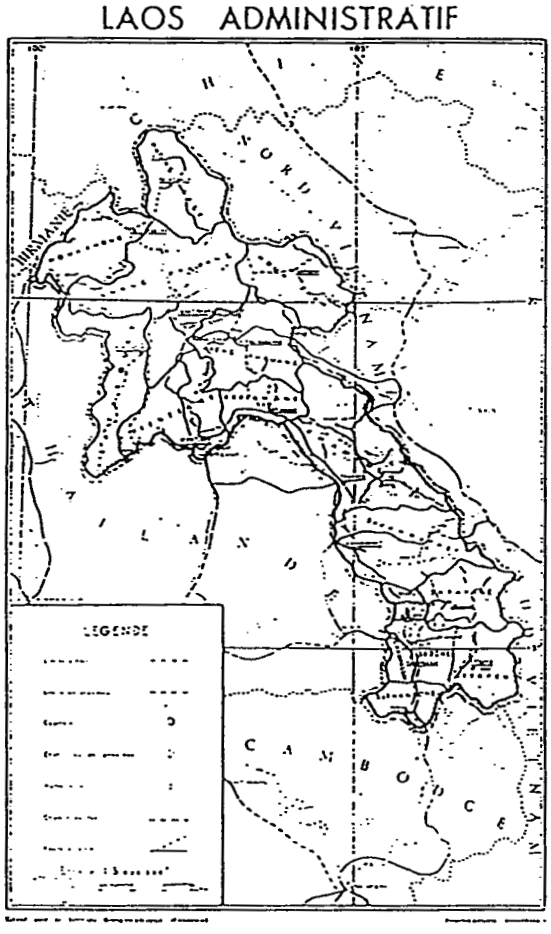

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THE MEO OF NORTHERN LAOS

The People and the Area:[1]

The Meo people spread over the mountain areas of much of Southeast Asia. "The Miao, a mountain dwelling people in South and West China, constitute one of the largest aboriginal groups of South China, numbering in the millions."[2] In North Vietnam the Meo number about 60,000,[3] in Thailand a few thousand,[4] and "in Laos they live scattered in high mountain areas and are said to number about 50,000."[5]

The Meo are in the process of drifting southward. Since they are such vast numbers and yet have no territory of their own, they have been a state of unrest for centuries.[6] Roux, who has followed the development of Meo history in Indochina, states: "It seems, if one can judge by the transformations which they (the Meo) have carried to the terrain during the forty years that I have followed them, that their first migrations do not go beyond 120 to 140 years. Those who were already 'village elders,' some of whom were over forty years of age, informed me that their fathers came from the extreme west of the Chinese province of 'Sze-Tchouan' from the eastern slopes of the Himalayas,"[7] This would give credence to statements of the writer's informants that their ancestors first entered Xieng Khouang Province about a century ago.

Xieng Khouang Province is located in northern Laos.[8] The provincial capital which carries the same name is located about 193.5 degrees east of Greenwich and about 19 degrees north of the equator. The province is largely a plateau of about 4000 feet altitude surrounded by mountains which rise 1000 to 5000 feet above the plateau.

Roux states that an estimated 30,000 Meo lived in the eastern part of the Province of Xieng Khouang in 1920.[9] It is not surprising, therefore, that a recent estimate (1959) placed the number of Meo in the entire province as 45,000. This estimate was given in conversation by the Laotian governor.

In the Province of Xieng Khouang there is a general classification of the three major ethnic groups according to the totography:

Lao. The Lao live principally in river valleys, where they carry on irrigated wet rice culture. In addition to this staple crop, they grow tobacco, straw for making thatched roofs, and divers minor crops. They know some crafts, such as pottery making and weaving, but very few of their number approach the status of specialists. The Lao live in elevated bamboo or

wooden houses with thatched roofs. A very few live in better houses with plastered walls and tile roofs. These are usually government officials and merchants.

The Lao are politically dominant in Laos, but maintain only a narrow margin of authority in Xieng Khouang. They are Buddhistic, and their strong adherence to their religion is a cohesive integrative force in their society. Most males spend some years in the "pagodas" in study. The Lao society and culture appears well integrated with no major stress or unsatisfied needs being evidenced.

Khmu: The Khmu, who are located in the foothills, carry on both wet rice farming and mountain rice horticulture. They live in houses which resemble the Lao in style but which are generally of bamboo, and less durable.

The Khmu are decidedly a political minority. They give little indication of attempting or desiring to attain political autonomy or political recognition.

> ...the Khmu show signs of deterioration and disintegration. The gongs and jars of tremendous value which are characteristic of tribal peoples in southeast Asia, and which are remembered as a part of Khmu culture of the past, are virtually gone. In all of southeast Asia these gongs and jars are a focal point of interest in the culture. They are symbols of prestige and wealth. The fact that they have disappeared among the Khmu, and that apparently nothing has replaced them, is certainly of significance.[10]

The Khmu, who have borrowed much from the Lao, have not adopted Buddhism. They have a form of animism.

Meo: The Meo are usually located high on the flanks of the mountains but just below the summit. Their culture is described in greater detail below, but a few items are given at this point for comparison with the Lao and Khmu.[11]

The Meo engage primarily in "slash and burn" agriculture. Dry mountain rice is their staple food. Their homes of rough wooden boards are built on the ground. Corn and some vegetables are grown, but they are particularly known for their production of opium.

The Meo appear to have maintained a higher degree of social and political solidarity than the Khmu. In the material culture, the Meo have retained their distinctive dress, are reluctant to use the official local currency, and persist in their traditional habitat. In the abstract and subjective realm, the Meo

continue in an acute consciousness of Meo society and culture, and reflect this consciousness in their rigid refusal to adopt freely elements of Lao culture.

Minor Ethnic Groups: With rare exception, the minor ethnic groups of the province are located in or near Xieng Khouang town. The town, with a population of about 1,500 people, serves as the administrative and commercial center for the province. Vietnamese artisans, Chinese traders, Indian cloth merchants, and representatives of Western cultures may be found in town. The western cultural influence is carried on by those who represent Western governments, serve as missionaries, operate the office of a commercial airline, and a few legionnaires who have settled in the area as ranchers or artisans.

Since this paper will deal with the Meo who live in the general proximity of Xieng Khouang town, the writer feels it worthwhile to give just a brief description of the area. The most prominent building in the town was a huge palatial structure which served as the residence for the French Counsellor. The Laotian governor, entitled "Chao Khoueng," lived in a large but less imposing home. These and a few other buildings were constructed of brick and tile. Such buildings belonged to officials, the French army, and a few local business men. Public buildings consisted of a school, a health clinic, office buildings for the government, and the daily market pavilion. Only one street ran through the town, with the above-mentioned buidlings and eight small shops being located along its sides.

Back of these more prominent buildings, the general population lived in scattered clusters of homesteads. Some such clusters might be limited to a single ethnic group, while others might be inhabited by several groups. The dwellings were of any architecture and built of any combination of materials. One sensed that most of the inhabitants considered their residences to be only temporary.

Only the eighth month festival and the daily market served as integrating elements for the community in Xieng Khouang town. The school was limited in its enrolment, and the numerous religious groups precluded any cohesion along religious lines.

Before the arrival of the writer in this area, a road had been maintained from the Coast in Vinh, Viet-Nam, to the border of Thailand. This road passed through Xieng Khouang. Because of difficulties of maintenance during the Communist activities, this road was closed. Travel in and out of the province had to be by plane. A small airline operated the sturdy DC3 planes during the dry season, and a smaller bush plane during the rainy season. Communications were made either by letter or by the public wireless. These services followed a semblance of regularity, but were never certain.

The rainy season served to isolate the area for the most part. Trails were slippery and dangerous, landslides were common, and air travel infrequent and dangerous. Often weeks would pass with no plane being able to land, but supplies and mail continued to come to the area by parachute. In sharp contrast, the dry season brought much activity in town and even to the remote parts of the province. Fields were being cleared to be burned off later. Trails, roads, bridges and buildings were repaired, and merchants competed with one another to charter planes to bring in new stocks and to replenish their supplies. Prices would begin to drop as scarce items became plentiful and the rice was being harvested. Nevertheless, air freight charges made imported products two and three times higher than prices at the coast. People moved about, and the market became an exciting place with many new items appearing on the racks. Such was Xieng Khouang town around which lived the Meo, Lao, and Khmu in ever widening arcs. Except for some groups who had moved into temporary quarters close to town, the nearest Meo village was an hour away by trail. Other villages which were five days away from Xieng Khouang still considered the town as their administrative and trading center.

Xieng Khouang was also the home of a very important Meo personage named Touby. He is singled out at this point because of his unique position. Touby was recognized by the French colonial government, and now is recognized by the independent Laotian government as the representative of the Meo people. He is highly respected by both the governmentand his own Meo society. Touby and the provincial governor are comparatively young men and maintain a close relationship on both personal and official levels.

Touby has championed the Meo people. While holding a position of influence with the administration, he also commands the respect, confidence, and support of the Meo. He is known throughout the whole area, and the Meo are quick to respond to requests made by him.

Just how and when Touby attained this status is not known to the writer. He lives next to the Lao governor, maintains a Meo militia, and has been influential in having Meo young people admitted to the public schools. During World War II and again during the Communist invasion of 1953-1953, he was given a field station beside the French and Lao commanders, and through his Meo militia furnished the government forces with almost uncanny intelligence and "guerrilla" support. Perhaps the latter is a factor in his present "role." Both the French-Lao administration and the Meo people hated the Japanese and Communist forces. Touby helped to integrate the two groups in driving out these invaders.

Today the government sees Touby as the representative of the Meo and the communicator between the Meo people and the administration. The Meo see Touby from the other side, as one who can influence the government and communicate the "mind" of the Meo to the government in an effective manner. Thus Touby appears to be the "connecting link: between the Lao governmental organization and the Meo's indigenous political system which extends only to the district level. In effect, the various districts are now brought together in an office which they have not instituted but in which Touby has been installed, with power, by the government. He is in a position to bring pressure to bear on the government in behalf of the Meo, and likewise, he is able to influence the Meo toward adherence to the government's programs. For the purpose of this paper, the writer considers Touby as the "paramount chief" of the Meo in Xieng Khouang Province.

Meo Social Organization.

It appears that a patrilineal clan system not only dominates Meo social organization but also serves as a primary integrating factor in Meo culture as a whole. It functions in a cohesive manner to interrelate the social, political, economic, and religious aspects of Meo culture.

The household is the basic unit in the Meo social structure. The term "household" must be treated somewhat loosely, since it need not refer only to those who live in one house. Rather, it includes those persons who are under the authority of the householder. This means that a man's (householder's) household will consist of his wife or wives, his children, their wives and children, and possibly children in the next generation. In addition, the household may have a few relatives who are too feeble, either physically or mentally, to maintain normal responsibilities, and are dependent upon their relatives in this particular household.

Members of a household always carry their clan name in addition to their given names. The clan names generally find their origin in mythology. Complete strangers who are unable to discover any common ancestry but who have the same clan name consider each other to be "clan brothers" and, consequently, observe any formalities or behavior which are therefore incumbent upon them.

Members of the same lineage refer to one another in a common term, ku to kew ti, "my youngers and olders." In the household the members call each other by specific terms which designate the actual relationship of "ego" to any other members of the household. Thus, even in everyday speech language serves to reinforce the traditional social structure in the minds of the Meo and implicitly indoctrinates the children in the same.

The numerical factor determines the actual domicile of the members of a household. One may observe as many as 34 people living under one roof. Frequently a married son may erect a house close to his father's home into which he moves after a child is born. This would not be considered as a new household in the sense that the term is used in this paper.

The household as a unit serves to train the children. Although children are basically the responsibility of their immediate parents, it appears that everyone in the household takes a part in the informal education and training of a younger person. Corrections may be made by elders without incurring the bad will of the parents. One never observes corporal punishment of children, but deep respect and obedience to parents and elders are characteristic of the Meo.

The Meo place high value on old age. In their conception, anyone of old age should have respect. The term of respect in Meo is Txi Lau, "grandfather," or Na Lau, "grandmother." These terms may be applied to younger people who have attained special status and deserve this sort of respect. The Meo train their young people to be self-reliant, and they admire a strong individualistic spirit. A stranger is impressed by the manners and poise that a young Meo boy will demonstrate when he is alone. Among his elders, he is just one of a group in the presence of the respected elders.

Within a household a young man may disagree with his father only in the mildest erms, although he may oppose him strongly. As a man assumes family responsibilities, he may become increasingly self-assertive, but should always pay deference to his aging father. The women are recognized as possessing authority over the children, but in all family considerations the father's word is final authority. Yet, should a father be the son of a householder, he is expected to acquiesce to the will of the householder.

In a Meo village one may find from one to forty houses. The average village has about eight houses. A village may have but one household, in which case the householder has the status of authority. Often there may be several households in a village, in which case the eldest householder usually functions as village head. Furthermore, some large villages have more than one clan represented. In this latter case, some complications appear in the pattern. This will be more fully discussed under "Political Organization."

While a distinct unit in the social organization, the household operates in a sphere which is largely defined by the patrilinear clan system. This is illustrated in the concepts of marriage and the events leading to it.

The practice of exogamous marriage is part of the customary law. In keeping with the principal that no one should marry a person of his own clan, a modified brother-sister taboo is observed between members of the opposite sex when they are of the same clan. Therefore, it is improper for a young man to manifest frivolity with a girl bearing his clan name./

After puberty a young man may attempt to gain the attention of a young girl of his liking. Of course she must be from a different clan. Acquaintance is often made and developed at such events as the New Year Festival Season. A village usually invites villages of another clan to come for festivities, which include games, contests, visiting and feasting. The village is likely to receive a reciprocal invitation before the five-day period is ended.

At such times everyone comes in his or her best clothing along with all the silver ornaments that can be accumulated. Girls proudly wear their colorful skirts as a display of their ability to sew and embroider. The young men demonstrate their prowess with horses and in contests. The playing of various musical instruments and the constant serenades add to the atmosphere of the occasion.

A hand ball game is always in order. Lines of young men form opposite to lines of young women. Partners, each from a different clan, stand facing each other. The girl produces a ball which she has made from wads of cloth. This is tossed back and forth with her partner. Serenading accompanies the tossing of the ball, and may continue for hours at a time. Traditionally, scores are kept of all dropped balls with each error being penalized, whereby the guilty party must discard one garment, as in "strip" piker. The writer never observed this practice in either Christian or non-Christian villages, but he noted other penalties being paid, such as gifts or "dates" for the evening. However, flirting would be a mild term to use for the boy-girl relationship during such festival seasons. The writer has been told by his informants that sex-play is quite free during the evening hours.

If the relationship between a boy and a girl develops into a serious interest for each other, the boy finds excuses to visit her village. Trial marriage, a normal practice among the Meo, is carried on with a semblance of disapproval by the girl's parents. It is customary for a girl who has attained puberty to sleep on a platform apart from the rest of her family. The young suitor may be expected to visit her during the night, but must come and go surreptitiously while the rest of the family is asleep. If the young girl responds favorably to the young man's advances, the romance should end in marriage.

However, marriage can only be realized after considerable maneuvering. The young man must secure a "go-between," usually an elder brother or paternal uncle, who will carry on all negotiations with the girl's parents concerning the young man's intentions. Several developments may occur. The parents may insist that the marriage be postponed until an elder sister's marriage. A satisfactory amoung of bride-wealth may not be agreed upon. The parents may insist that their daughter is needed at home for another year until the smaller children are older. If a settlement cannot be reached and the young people are extremely interested in becoming married, they may resort to an elopement. In such a case settlements and adjustments must be made later and often involves a decision being made by a panel of neutrals.

If the mediary for the young man is successful in arranging a satisfactory amount of bride-wealth with the parents of the girl, marriage is guaranteed. If the bride-wealth is immediately available, marriage formalities may be carried out without dealy. Silver neck bands are usually exchanged between the bride and groom.

The family or household of the groom gives a feast for the household of the bride. This is followed two days later by a reciprocal feast being offered by the household of the bride. At these feasts smaller gifts, such as silver rings may be exchanged between the parents and/or the householder, as the case may be. These formalities are the official announcement and legal evidence for the marriage of the young couple. At the same time it serves to encourage close relationships between the two households involved, and to some measure, between the two clans.

Marriage has very important effects on the girl's relationship with her parents. In theory, she leaves her father's family, household and clan. She becomes fully identified with the family of her husband. Should he die, she is responsible to the family of her husband. She has no demands whatsoever on herown father's family. In actual practice she may visit her home frequently, and even continue close relations with her family. After all, there may be other marriages being planned between the two clans or even between the two households. However, the wife never benefits from any inheritance in her original family.

Polygyny is common among the Meo, but is usually the result of the levirate. One case of soral polygyny was observed by the writer. Wealthy men may be able to have several wives. One of them is considered the more important "big wife" and

directs the activities of the other wives in the matter of household duties. All wives live together under the same roof, and usually share the same sleeping area. They give no appearance of emotional complexes.

Divorce is possible, but not frequent. The Meo frown upon a young man who "runs around" promiscuously in the guise of trying to find a wife. Likewise, the Meo dislike divorce, and attempt in every way to avoid it. The writer was invited to sit on a panel which was to hear the complaints between a young wife and her husband. The panel consisted of the householder from the young man's household, the householder from the wife's former household, and the district chief in whose district the two households were located. Both the young wife and the young husband were permitted to voice their complaints and counter-complaints. Then the panel discussed the situation. The district chief finally summarized the discussion of the panel in strong terms of advice to the young couple. The advice was heeded, and the divorce avoided. This is the general procedure in such controversies, and it helps to maintain the stability of a marriage.

It would seem that the patrilinear clan system of the Meo serves to solidify the marriage and at the same time uses marriage to integrate the clans. Good marital relations are conducive to good clan relationships, which in turn are conducive to further marriages within the clans. The reciprocal element in the festivals, in the marriage feasts, and in finding marriage partners is a strong cohesive factor in inter-clan relationships. The patrilinear clan system must be considered most important to the solidarity of the Meo social organization.

Meo Political Organization

It is difficult to determine the full scope of the traditional Meo political system by observing the people in the Xieng Khouang Province. From the history of the Meo it appears that they possessed a strong and organized kingdom at some time before they entered Laos.[12]

Today the Meo are under the authority of an independent Lao government. Until recently, they were under the French in an "indirect rule" form of administration; this rule was preceded by Japanese occupation troops during World War II, and formerly by the rigid "old colonial" French authority. In spite of this confusion at the summit of administration, the Meo appear only mildly disturbed, and continue with a local political system which seems close to indigenous forms.

The patrilinear clan system with its household unit is an integral factor in the Meo system of authority. On the level of the household, the Meo's social and political systems find root

in common soil. Thus, in describing the household, it seems that one is actually describing the foundations for both Meo social organization and Meo political structure.

Political authority appears to involve the Meo concept of respect for elders. A child is responsible to his father. If he is not a householder, a father is responsible for his family to the householder, who is usually his father, grandfather, or an elder brother. The householder apparently holds an ascribed status of authority which extends over the members of his household. In the smaller conjugal family units which make up the household, the parents must answer to the householder for the behavior of their children. This does not prevent any older person from assisting in the training of any child, as has already been indicated.

The householder has the final authority in matters of the household. Such authority is not of a dictatorial nature, but reflects the householder's considered opinion after discussion with the adult men under his authority. It appears that the degree of authority which the householder holds over his children and his children's children may vary with the proximity of these offspring. The writer illustrates with three examples.

(1) Zon Tsho with his wife and child left the village of his father, and settled several days away in the Xieng Khouang town area. He did not appear to incur any disapproval from the Meo in either area. They considered that he had established a new household.

(2) Ba Si and his wife lived with his parents in their house. His father, the householder, was addicted to opium, and contributed a minimum of effort in providing for the household. This may have been a factor in Ba Si's defection from traditional Meo behavior. Much to his father's disapproval, he frequently procured odd jobs for cash income instead of assisting his father in the householder's rice fields. Although the writer feels that the father was quite incapable of adequately administering his household, the general attitude of the Meo was one of criticism toward Ba Si for his lack of respect and deference to his father. A few criticism was leveled toward his father for not having properly trained Ba Si to conform to the Meo pattern of authority.

(3) Ntrua, an adolescent, worked for the writer. He lived in Xieng Khouang town. His father came periodically to receive Ntrua's wages. In turn, he gave his son some money for necessary purchases, such as rice and other items for his livelihood. Thus, although he was some distance from his father, Ntrua was clearly under the authority of the father. This was probably due to several factors: the proximity of town, his youth, and the temporary situation of his employment.

However, it would seem that the authority of the householder is not absolute, but may be modified under certain conditions. Ntrua submitted to his father's will without any question or sign of reluctance. Ba Si incurred public disfavor because of his lack of parental respect. Zon Tsho was considered to be following proper procedure in establishing a new household. He was not without a superior authority, since he was still subject to the district chief and also was under the sanctions of his clan.

A village chief is a householder. In a village of one householder, the selection of the chief is automatic. In a village of more than one household, the eldest householder is customarily the village chief. The writer has observed exceptions to this, but cannot explain such unless it would be in recognition of military honors which the individual has received from the government.

On the village level this chief functions between households in much the same manner as the householder does between members of a household. The village has a good measure of autonomy. Therefore, the village chief is more than just a representative of the village; he is an honored leader on the local scene. He holds a place of prestige at the local festivals, is the judge in inter-household disputes, and is expected to administer to the good of the community. He is responsible for the maintenance of the trails, for opening new ones, and for moving operations should the entire village move to a new location. He has authority in emergencies. During the Communist occupation, he was responsible for the evacuation of his village and its defence. Even as the householder in the household, so the chief in his village is not a dictator, but with the counsel of other householders he serves to make the community a cooperative unit. Occasionally some family may feel abused, and move to take up residence in another area, thus forming a new household. This means some hardship until such time as they are able to gain an adequate subsistence in the new location.

When a village consists of more than one clan, problems of harmony are more common. The writer is unaware as to just how these villages developed in this manner. Apparently the government recognizes one chief for such a village, while the local population generally considers two men to be chiefs. The eldest householder of each clan is recognized by his clansmen as their village chief. This is an ascribed status from the Meo viewpoint. In most local affairs there appears to be harmony, but difficulty arises and tensions develop when outside or upper level authority attempts to enforce certain measures through only one of the chiefs. Strong feelings may result in the loss of cooperation between the clans. The writer observed one case which resulted in the minority clan group moving to a new site only five

minutes away. Subsequently, the two groups regained friendly relationships, but remained apart. Inter-marriage appeared to be a real factor in this amelioration.

Above the rank of village chief is a district chief. He may have as many as forty villages under his supervision. It may be at this point that the resemblance with the traditional political organization of the Meo begins to break down. The district chief is appointed by the "paramount chief," Touby, in conjunction with the Lao governor of the province. It seems that Touby attempts to conform with a semblance of what may have been the former Meo pattern in that the district chief is usually a village chief and is selected from the clan which is predominant in the district. The district chief is primarily the communicator between the village and the high office. The district chief is often called to settle disputes between villages or members of differenct villages. For example, he sat on the panel to listen to the case of the young married couple mentioned above. The husband and wife had been from different villages, and the parents of each desired the district chief to attend.

The Meo are desirous of settling disputes at the lowest level of authority. Thus, inter-family disputes would be settled within the household, inter-household within the village, inter-village disputes within the district, and inter-district within the sphere of Touby's authority. This does not mean that such disputes had to be between mass groups, but might be between individuals from within these unit categories. Seldom do disputes between Meo go beyond Touby. In cases involving the Meo with members of another ethnic group, Touby served as counsel for the Meo. He has proved himself most influential in this respect before both the Lao and French officials.

The economic returns of the political offices are significant but not sufficient to support fully the man and his family. The village chief receives gifts from the villagers, but these do not appear as payment to any overt obligation, but rather to assist him in the hospitality he is expected to show to all travelers. Both the village chief and the district chief are supposed to receive a small commission on all taxes and fees collected. Fees and taxes have been exacted of the Meoonly in recent years. Fees may be gathered for marriage and birth certificates. The cooperation of the Meo in thisprogram is increasing.

The writer considers the village to be the extent in which the indigenous Meo political system operates today. The district level seems to be a transition zone which might be likened to a bridge which is anchored on one side in the traditional Meo system on the village level with the other side being firmly entrenched in the national government complex. It seems that

Touby is a major factor in the maintenance of this relationship. It is important to observe that the household is not seriously affected in this situation, and even as it continues to function as the basic unit in the Meo social structure, so it also serves as a strong integrative force in the Meo political organization.

A brief word may be given to indicate the Lao plan of adopting a policy to incorporate all ethnic groups into their political system. Some years back, any individual residing in Laos who could not give sufficient evidence that he was a citizen of another nation was made a citizen of Laos. He was made responsible for taxes, military service, and conformance to Lao law. Enforcement of these rulings, with all the implications involved, has been gradually developed. The various ethnic groups are gradually being introduced to the political system both as it concerns their responsibilities and as it concerns their privileges. Taxes are collected by cash payment or contributed labor. The Meo send representatives to the national assembly, as do the other ethnic groups.

As yet one is not sure whether this is an honest attempt to have these peoples fully represented in the federal government or whether it is a stop-gap measure to stem the apparent nationalistic tendencies of the Meo. The honor and prestige given to Touby and other Meo leaders, the educational facilities being offered to the Meo on an increasing scale, and the other benefits now available would indicate the former motive. A firm ruling against the Meo having their language in written form might indicate the latter motive. At any rate, the political system appears to be in a process of change, and the influence of French domination is decreasing. None of this seems to have seriously affected the indigenous Meo form of authority on the local village level.

Meo Economy

The role of the household in the Meo social and political structure is reflected and illustrated in the Meo economy. The division of labor is clearly related to the social and political patterns. Subsistence, land tenure, property rights, inheritance, and the economic factors relating to marriage and religious rites are all tied into the socio-politico aspects of the household.

Rice is the basic food staple for the Meo population in Xieng Khouang. Its production requires the full cooperation of the entire household, and is supervised by the householder. A regular annual cycle is followed in this rice economy.

Planting is carried out at the beginning of the rainy season in late April and May. The work may be done by any members of the

family. During the rainy season some cultivation is done, but generally the rice stalks must fight their own battle with the weeds.

In late October, at the close of the rainy season, the grain ripens quickly and everyone joins in the harvest. Temporary shelters are erected on the field, since it must be watched until the harvest is completed and the rice is safely stored in the village. Hand sickles are used in cutting the rice stalks which are gathered into large stacks right on the field. This is done in urgent haste for fear of losing the over-ripened grain.

The stalks are then flailed and the grain is stored in huge carrying baskets. This work is the main concern of the women. Transportation of the rice to the village may be by human carrier or pack horse. A rice field may be as far as a full day's travel from the village. While the flailing is done by the women, the men prepare granaries to receive the rice. Some are built on strong platforms outside the house, while smaller ones may be erected inside the dwelling. These granaries are usually made of tightly woven bamboo.

During this entire harvesting process every member of the household is involved in the cooperative effort. Feeble elders watch the infants and prepare meals for everyone. Young boys may be seen leading the pack horses laden with grain. Young girls assist their sex in flailing the rice stalks, gathering rice into baskets and performing other chores.

Assured that the harvesting process can be successfully completed, a selected few of the stronger men may actually commence the task of clearing new ground for next year's planting. In the "slash and burn" technique for clearing the field, the heavy vegetation and trees are cut down early in the dry season to give the sun as much time as possible to carry out the drying process before burning time in March. When the rice harvest is complete the men are joined by others of the household who methodically go through the site of the new field and cut down all vegetation.

By March the area should be dry enough to burn and is set afire. After the field has cooled, the entire family sets about clearing the debris, allowing only boulders and tree stumps to remain. The soil is loosened as much as possible after the first rainy days, followed by the planting of the rice, and thus the cycle is continued. Ideally, new ground is cleared each year, and some poorer soil is allowed to lie fallow. A field may be used for three or four successive years.

Potatoes, corn, squash and other minor food crops are grown by the Meo, but play a small part in the economy. Potatoes are sometimes sold to Westerners, but are most commonly used as

fertilizer in the opium field. Corn and squash are used to feed the livestock unless the rice harvest is very slight.

Another important but non-edible crop is the opium poppy. Every household has its opium field. The men erect a woven bamboo fence around a plot of ground near their village. As just mentioned, potatoes are used as fertilizer, and the soil must be carefully prepared. The opium harvest requires much skill and care. Most of the entire process is carried on by the women.

Opium is the main source of cash revenue for the Meo. In fact, it often serves as a medium of exchange. The first missionaries in the area were quite shocked to find carefully wrapped "globs" of opium in the offering at church. Embree writes:

> Supposedly the production of opium is controlled by the French authorities, but both they and others are of the opinion that much illicit trade in opium does take place. Some of this doubtless goes to Siam in payment for manufactured goods from England and the United States.[13]

At the time of the writer's field work, Xieng Khouang was the only province in all of Indochina where the government officially permitted the cultivation of the opium poppy. The French administrator told the writer that an estimated 60% of the men of Xieng Khouang Province were addicted to opium. Its great worth and economy of transport makes opium of unique value to the Meo. One kilo of opium is worth one-half ton of rice. It is used as barter in the Xieng Khouang dialy market as well as in the district markets and in the villages. Obviously opium plays a major role in the Meo economy.

Flax is probably less important today than in earlier Meo history. Chinese merchants trade yard goods for opium. Yet one still sees the women spinning the flax on their thighs and storing it in large balls. It is lager woven into long lengths of cloth, and through a mixture of techniques, including cire perdu and dyes, becomes designed materials for the typical Meo skirt. The hem of the skirt is beautifully embroidered in cross stitch with silk threads. Pleats are sewn in by hand and a beautiful skirt is formed, being approximately twenty feet wide at the hem.

Livestock plays a very important part in the Meo economy. Poultry, goats, pigs, buffalo and cattle are found in most villages. They are used for meat in the household and as cash income at the market. The Meo are considered adept in their care of animals. This is confirmed by comparing their livestock with those of other ethnic groups including the European ranchers.

Little milk is produced by the cattle. Goat's milk is more commonly used by the Meo. Poultry is used for meat, and serves as the most common sacrifice in cases of sickness. Eggs are eaten only occasionally. Other meat-supplying animals may be used for sacrifice if severe illness requires it. A cow would be the last and most expensive sacrifice.

For the Meo, a horse serves very practical purposes both for traveling and for transport of material. They are well groomed, fed, and splendidly trained. Meo horses demonstrate amazing sure-footedness and endurance on the steep and rugged trails of Laos. They will generally bring a better price than the average oriental horse.

Every household has at least one horse, and more often will possess several. The horse appears to have prestige value in addition to economic worth. The horse, owned by the household, is under the supervision of the householder. It seems that a member may consider the horse to be his, but in actuality he means that it is his to use and that he is responsible for its care.

The writer has previously mentioned two young married men, Zon Tsho and Ba Si. Both of these young men purchased horses. Meo public opinion again was evident and was consistent with its previous expression. It was perfectly legitimate for Zon Tsho to own a horse, since he had established a new household a long distance from his parents. Ba Si was again out of order in considering his purchased horse as his own, since it belonged to his father, the householder, in accordance with recognized Meo political, economic and social sanction.

Meo Material Culture

The Meo house is made entirely of wood. Beams, boards and shingles are hewn out by axe. Inside the structure, a sleeping platform is erected, and may or not be enclosed. There are no windows, but there are plenty of cracks and also two doors. Two fireplaces are found in every house. One is for cooking, and the other forms a center for all social gatherings. One area of the wall is reserved for a shrine or altar for the spirits, or Tlan.

Every household has at least one rice pounder, a rather clumsy but effective device for knocking the hulls off the rice. One corn mill of rotating stone grinders is also the common property of a household. This particular item is not found among other ethnic groups in Laos.

Tools, saddles, cross-bows, Meo-made flint lock guns, musical instruments, and the various items needed for food preparation

make up most of the material goods which one finds in all Meo households. Wealth is tied up in livestock, opium and silver. The Meo use solid silver in bars for trade and in other pieces for ornaments. If one travels a day from Xieng Khouang he will find it difficult to do any buying with the Lao paper currency. He should carry old silver coins issued before World War II.

In addition to the implication of division of labor which has been given above, it should be noted that the women are responsible for the preparation and serving of food. This includes the pounding or grinding of the grain, the winnowing, and the cooking. The women carry all the water.

Young men have one special function in food preparation. They pour steamed rice into wooden troughs during festivals, and beat this into a pulp. Then they make patties of it, wrap the patties in banana leaves, and roast them to make what the Meo call their greatest delicacy.

Firewood is brought in by the boys, although the older men assist them from time to time in felling trees and cutting the wood into lengths for carrying.

The men build and repair buildings and fences. They care for the livestock. Clearing the fields is mainly their responsibility as well. Specialists serve as silversmiths and gunsmiths. However, this does not provide them with enough income to refrain from the regular work cycle in production of the rice staple.

Land is owned and used by the ones who have cleared it. Usufruct of land is quite common. Usually a Meo household will have three or four rice fields and one opium field in production. This varies with the size of the household, number of families, wives and children. A married son may start work on a field of his own, if he can carry on without upsetting the distribution of labor in the household interests.

Married daughters receive no inheritance from their father's estate. Household property is under the supervision of the householder. Upon his death, the property is really not inherited, since it still belongs to the house old. The property now comes under the supervision of the new householder, who may be a younger brother or the eldest son of the deceased.

In the event of the death of a husband in the household, the wife has the use of the materials which he had "possessed." Unless she is quite elderly, she is very apt to become the second wife of her husband's brother. Upon her death, the material she had from her first husband is re-distributed within the household.

In marriage, the bride-wealth is supposedly the responsibility of the groom. The entire household may assist him in procuring the needed amount, but this help is apparently left to the discretion of the householder. It may be conditioned by the latter's evaluation of the bride and also the manner in which the young man has participated in the task of providing for the household. In any event, the young man is expected to lay aside any wealth which he can accumulate in anticipation of marriage. This reserve may come from extra labor, wage labor, gifts from the householder, and other good fortune.

In the actual marriage rites the practice of reciprocal feasts and gifts by the two households are always involved. Such procedures are carried out by the household as a whole, and the entire unit therefore carries the economic obligations which are involved. This all serves to integrate the young man more firmly into his household, to make firmer ties between the households and the clans, and to legalize the marriage.

In religious rites, taxes, and funeral expenses, the entire household again carries the financial responsibilities as a unit. Thus again, in the economic sphere, one observes the integral part played by the household in relating this aspect of Meo life to the social and political spheres. In actuality, it is impossible to segregate clearly one aspect from either of the others, because they are so tightly interwoven on the household level.

Meo Folklore and Beliefs.

Meo folklore which carried the "History of the Meo" is of a vocabulary little used in the current vernacular. Either the forms have passed out of use or reflect contact with the Chinese.[14] It is given orally in couplet form, and can be recited for days by the few old men who still remember it. Their history contains certain ancestral heroes who are supposed to have taken on pseudo-spirit qualities and continue to aid the Meo today. Certain other ancestral spirits became jealous, and continue today their attempts to thwart the benevolent "spirits" or Tlan as the Meo call these spirit phenomena.

The folklore gives accounts of a first creation, a universal flood with two survivors in a barrel, and a great series of conflicts and exploits leading to the clan "fathers." Apparently, these are vaguely identified with the present clans.[15]

Many stories are attributed to the mythology. They usually revolve about two brothers, one of whom is rather stupid but strong, and the other who is a cunning trickster. These two are usually involved in conflict with malevolent Tlan who are intent on harming the Meo.

In just what manner one might relate the folklore to present-day beliefs and Meo culture is difficult to determine. It appears that the Meo clan system is tied in with the folklore both as far as origin is concerned and as far as internal organization is concerned. It seems that the relationships between personages in the folklore pattern are consistent with the household and clan complex described in this paper.

Present-day beliefs among the Meo are vague and inconsistent concerning life after death and the spirit realm. There is a concept that after death the soul remains in the house and inhabits the next child of the family. Some deny this concept and believe that the soul goes to dwell in the land of the Meo Tlan. At the time of death, the dead person was traditionally given a seat of honor in his house, where he remained several days before burial. Feasts were conducted in his honor, the Tu ua neng had special rites with the Tlan world in behalf of the deceased, and many dirges were chanted. These were normally sung by young men who had learned them from the Tu ua neng. After the proper period of time, the body was buried outside the village, after which the spirit either returned to dwell in the house or went to the land of the Tlan, depending on whose concepts one accepts.

The Meo observe an annual visit with their household Tlan, which some believe to be the representative of their ancestors. The doors are shut, and no one is allowed to enter or leave until the visit is over. This may last one or several days. A friend who has traveled days to visit the household must find lodging elsewhere until the taboo period is over. Informants reported that they never saw or heard anything during this period, but knew that they should all be gathered in one house so that the Tlan would find them.

The Meo are animistic. They have numerous Tlan which are classified according to their functions. There are the Tlan of the water, of fertility, of the trail, of the hearth, of the sleeping quarters, of the rice field, for hunting, and numerous other categories.

The Tu ua neng[16] in a Meo village has a very important role. He has certain powers which help to define his responsibilities. These powers are recognized by the Meo to have been given to the Tu ua neng by the Tlan. This power, possibly a Tlan which dwells in him,[17] enables the Tu ua neng to cure the sick, determine the meaning of signs and dreams, give security to a new infant, predict the future through ordeals, and in general communicate between the living Meo and the Tlan world.

The Tu ua neng may be male or female. He or she is given an ascribed status by the Meo on the basis of his relationship to

the Tlan. However, there is an achieved status as well, which is determined by the degree of effectiveness of the Tu ua neng's influence carries in the Tlan world. This is reflected in his ability to cure the sick, to drive away malevolent Tlan, and to influence the Tlan world for the welfare of Meo society. The Tu ua neng is responsible for making all fetishes, erecting altars in the homes and placing shrines along the trail and at the rice fields. His role does not compete with that of the householder or chief, since he operates in a different sphere of life, although it might appear that their areas of influence overlap.

In cases of illness, the Tu ua neng is called. The Meo consider that the soul (pli) is attempting to leave the body of the sick person. If the person becomes unconscious, it has departed and will depart for good unless it can be brought back. The Tu ua neng arrives, and orders the area around the altar cleared. The body of the sick person is brought and laid before the altar.

With various "sacred" gongs and rattles the Tu ua neng attempts to call kindly Tlan for help. Having achieved this, he launches into a chant which develops into garbled sounds when "real communication" is being made. Meanwhile, members of the household kill a sacrifice at the doorway.[18] The blood of the sacrifice is poured on a paper doll that represents the sick person. This is then buried in the doorway. At the end of the ceremony, which may take many hours, the Tu ua neng casts the split horn of a cow on the ground. The manner in which the two pieces fall determines whether the person will recover. This sort of oracle is also used for other situations.

In time of epidemics, the Tu au neng erects a type of doorway on each trail leading into the village. The Tlan is thereby urged to protect the village. Such frames are commonly encountered on the trail.

The Meo do not consider a Tu ua neng categorically to pass on his role to his or her child, since the position is not inherited but requires appointment and enablement by the Tlan. This appointment is attested by effective power in pragmatic tests. A village of any size may have more than one Tu ua neng. Some are recognized as having special powers for certain situations. Small fees are paid for services of the Tu ua neng, but he must subsidize this small income with a considerable amount of rice horticulture.

The Meo appear keenly aware of the unusual. The Tlan may cause good and bad fortune. Therefore, it is little wonder with the increasing political, social, and economic pressures that the Meo endeavor to employ the spirit realm to afford some control on their environment. A fallen tree, a washout, a strange rock

formation, lightning striking a tree, and many other phenomena require interpretation by the Tu ua neng with any subsequent tabooes which he may consider essential. One seldom travels any distance on a trail without observing areas where great numbers of sticks are standing on the ground. This part of the trail is thought to possess some strange Tlan, as a murder, accident or illness overtook someone there. Placing the sticks in the ground by the traveler indicates his recognition of a Tlan presence, and guarantees the individual safe passage. Likewise, a drop or increase in the price of opium, rice, and taxes are accredited to good or bad relationships with the Tlan as the case may be.

Thus, with the Meo there is a constant awareness of his associations with the Tlan and of the requirements and duties which are incumbent on him if he is to cultivate their good will and secure their aid. In keeping with this concept, the Meo are continually showing deference to the Tlan by innumerable taboos and ceremonies. Examples of such are the fetishes placed on the body following birth, blessings sought at marriage, before trail journeys or hunting trips, and solicitation of Tlan help during the crop seasons.

Individuals vary in their attitude toward the Tlan. Some appear to be deeply confident of the effectiveness of the varied observances. Others appear to hold to it because of tradition and hope it may do some good. It would appear to this writer that the Meo whom he observed may have been involved in much more detailed attempts to control the Tlan world than would be indicated by reports given by Bernatzik and other investigators whom he quotes. At the same time, it appears that the Xieng Khouang Meo are quite disunited in any pattern of beliefs.

Therefore, one questions if this may not indicate an attitude of insecurity among the Meo. Although the clan and household unit remain as integrative units, there appear to be separations from the traditional pattern of Meo life--especially in the matter of belief. It seems that this is the first real piece of evidence of any major break-down in Meo culture.

Before leaving the religious aspect of Meo beliefs, there should be mention of the Meo concept of a supreme being whom they call Fua Tai. The writer does not believe that the nature of his work in Laos has influenced his understanding of this concept. In Meo thinking, Fua Tai created all things and originally had close communication with man. He became distraught with man, and left him to the "spirit" world. Fua Tai still exists, but is no longer concerned with the affairs of men.

The Meo Life Cycle

With the Meo, life is conceived as one long series of events with no great traumatic experiences leading from one stage to another. Birth and death are considered the major crises, while marriage is an important event that assures the continuance of the Meo society and culture. The household functions throughout the life of the Meo, and serves as the mold in which life is lived.

The Meo father is recognized for the part he plays in causing the conception of a child. At birth, he assists the wife during the delivery, and receives the child. He cuts the cord, and immediately bathes the baby with warm water. The writer has observed a father dashing water over a new-born infant as he squatted in the doorway of his house on a frosty morning. The writer does not know of any significance which the Meo place on the father's assisting with the delivery. If it is associated with the couvade it is such in only a minor form, inasmuch as the father does not observe any period of confinement. The writer did not observe any taboos on the part of the father. It was evident, however, that the Meo expect the father to be present for the delivery. On one occasion a catechist asked to be excused from school until his child was born. He was asked when he expected the child, and replied that it would depend on the sex of the baby. If the baby is a girl, the Meo claim that it takes nine months for maturity; ten months are required for a baby boy.

Shortly after birth of a child, a Tu ua neng is summoned to place fetishes on the child's neck and limbs to encourage the soul to stay in the body. Also, these fetishes may guard against a malevolent tlan which might attempt to claim the life of the infant. This fear is emphasized by the fact that Meo children, who are often given numbers instead of names, are never named number one. The Meo state that the tlan might not look for number two until he has found number one.

During infancy the child is cared for by mother, father, and any of the other children. The mother will generally remain in confinement for only a few days unless she is from a wealthy household. Children are allowed to nurse as long as the mother has milk. There is no traumatic weaning experience for the Meo child. It is common to observe a mother nursing a child in her arms, and simultaneously nursing another who stands beside her. There appears to be little toilet training, and only after adolescence has begun does the Meo go beyond the village limits to perform his toilet. Children are frequently pacified by manipulation of their sex organs. This causes no apparent sexual irregularieies in later life.

During childhood the children commence to share in work responsibility. Both boys and girls may follow their mother about and assist her. Boys may follow their father about as he performs his tasks. Primarily, the children serve as "baby sitters" and also gather firewood. They observe the duties which will later fall to them because of their sex, andmake attempts to perform these tasks. They get their first introduction to riding horses, shooting the cross-bow and hunting.

Childhood is a time for recreation also. Games of tag and hide-and-seek are common. Every boy has his spin top, which is used for a game in which the older boys and even the men may engage to amuse themselves. These tops, wound about with strong cord are set spinning at high speed. Experts can place them on a precise spot from some distance. In the contests, one person attempts to dislodge and replace his opponent's spinning top with his own.

No specific rites are performed at puberty. The Meo girls may start wearing white scarves over their heads to indicate that they have reached puberty. These scarves are often used to cover half the face as an indication of real or affected shyness.

Adolescence is conceptually a time for preparing for marriage. Both sexes become proficient in discharging the work responsibilities that Meo society demands of them. Recreation takes on new dimensions. Horse racing is common, and sexual adventures become a frequent activity.

Young couples interested in marriage usually practice trial marriage, as has already been described. Although this is spoken of in a joking manner by the Meo, they consider it an essential phase in the life cycle and necessary for securing a suitable partner. Except at the time of the festivals, little affection is shown between the seces in public, although there is little doubt that such relationships persist betweem them.

As the young people gain maturity and become increasingly aware of their desire for marriage, each will seek more earnestly to prove his or her readiness for marriage by demonstrating the perfection of his or her labors. The young man begins to lay aside a reserve for the bride-wealth, while the young lady makes additional skirts and secures a silver neck piece to present to her husband at marriage. The process of contracting a marriage has been discussed above and does not require repetition.

Adulthood is considered to begin with marriage. The prime objective in adulthood is to carry on the process of the cycle of life, i.e., raising children and training them in the traditions of Meo society and culture. To be considered as good parents the adults must not only provide for their family but must

successfully rear their children in the Meo way of life. Life is meaningful to the adult Meo, not so much in his preparation for old age and death, but as he sees the development of his descendants in the Meo tradition. He finds that life has special satisfaction if he can observe this continuum in the life of his own grandchildren.

Old people are highly respected by all the people in the village. Those who have attained success in the matters of the previous paragraph enjoy the highest prestige and deference. The writer has often observed the great care and attention which an entire village shows to elderly people, and the measure of pride displayed when he was introduced to these aged Meo.

Death closes the life cycle for the Meo. Adjustments are difficult for the bereaved. Traditionally, the Tu ua neng is called to perform all that is essential to ensure the deceased a safe journey into the next realm. The deceased continues to live in the memories of the bereaved. Dreams are considered desirable, since they are means by which the departed spirit communicates with the living.

From birth to death the individual is not only made aware of his responsibilities to the household, but he also learns to reckon on his household for security and status in the social, political, economic and religious spheres of Meo culture.

Recent Changes in Meo Culture

Among the Meo of Laos, the decade from 1940 to 1950 brought about many observable changes in culture. These people had been a southward drift from China for about three generations. They had entered an area where they were more accessible to other ethnic groups and Western influence, and where they were engulfed in a sequence of wars and political upheavals. Since 1940 control of Laos has passed from the French to the Japanese, to the Lao, and back to the French from whom it has only recently been disengaged. During these times of stress, the various local ethnic groups were placed under common dangers and hardships. Such conditions resulted in closer communication and cooperation between them. Thus, in addition to the constant change which takes place within any culture, the Meo were under severe pressures from without.

Comparison of the Meo situation before 1940 with that which existed after 1950 is amazing. The writer does not attempt to psychoanalyze these changes which have occurred in the major phases of Meo life.

A market scene in 1950 shows a large number of Meo participating in both the buying and the selling. A decade earlier, they

were rarely seen in town.

Many Meo now engage in wage labor. The airline company has Meo employees handling the freight. The Meo assist local artisans in brick making, wood work and building. Others are employed for domestic tasks in homes and gardens. Still others have jobs with the Travaux Publiques in road maintenance and in repair shops. The writer does not wish to imply that there is a mass movement to wage labor such as are found in the mining areas of Africa. The Meo uses wage labor as a source of cash income to supplement the livelihood derived from horticulture.

There are a few instances of Meo actually changing their economy. The writer knows a few who have been able to lease terraced fields for irrigated rice farming. Some of these were encouraged and underwritten by Touby. Still other Meo have become mechanics, trained medical practitioners, and specialists in other types of work.

Most of the Meo still maintain a basic mountain rice economy. Nevertheless, it is evident that there is a trend toward a modified cash economy. The Meo are anxious to possess western saddles, western knives, saws and other tools. Those who live near town purchase bicycles, motor bikes, and some even own jeeps. Most of the Meo wish to own Western guns. They want to buy medicine, sun glasses, colorful hats, footwear, flashlights, and any number of miscellaneous items which may be purchased in the Xieng Khouang shops. These "needs" require cash income. This cash is obtained largely through opium, wage labor, and the sale of surplus items.

The Meo have a faculty for inquiry into and adoption of new items. This is illustrated again and again as new elements have been introduced into their area. The inquisitive Meo will flock to an airstrip to see a plane. When the first one appeared on the outskirts of Xieng Khouang, the Meo not only joined the crowd as observers, but were found in the pilot's cabin attempting to determine the functions of all the gadgets. The writer has experienced the same with a jeep. The women are quick to employ a sewing machine. The men are quick to use new tools. Whether it be an imported doll whose sex they must determine, a soccer ball, a bicycle, or any other new items, the Meo are anxious to investigate and adapt it, if it will fit into their way of life.

Recent changes are also affecting the political sphere of Meo culture. The political bridge, on the district level, which ties the Meo into the national government of Laos, has already been indicated. However, intelligent interest in this larger political configuration is only beginning to emerge, as the Meo have come to be considered citizens of Laos and also to be

represented in the National Assembly.

Increased enforcement of taxes, marriage licenses, and various permits for such things as selling and wood cutting directly affect the Meo and have stimulated their interest in the larger political sphere. This political interest is augmented further by increased literacy, more frequent contact with Xieng Khouang town, and Meo candidates for provincial and national political offices.

As yet these changes have not seriously affected the Meo political organism on the local village level because the traditional channels of authority are used. Nevertheless, the increasing measure of participation in government programs of taxation, legislation, and the military indicates a strong change in the basic Meo attitude toward authority.

With this cooperation, the Meo are receiving greater opportunities for education, medical attention, and recognition in all civic functions. Perhaps the most significant progress has been made in the area of education. In many Meo villages schools have been set up by the village households. Often the village has been able to pay a higher salary to a Lao teacher than the government pays in the official public schools. Literacy has been extremely low among the Meo, but it is increasing now at a rapid pace.

In Xieng Khouang the public school has admitted Meo children who have the ability to read and write in Lao. Those who maintain consistently high scholarship are permitted to complete their elementary education. Some have gone to lycées at Vientiane and Saigon. Others are receiving special training in various trades and professions.

Economic, political, and educational changes are certain to have some effects in the social sphere. The intrusion of cash economy, participation in a broader political sphere, and educational developments (especially school programs which necessitate young people being away from home for extended periods) have all put strain on the primary integrative force in Meo society--the household.

Briefly, one can see the points of stress. A child attends school in Xieng Khouang town for many months. He has not been subject to the direct social sanctions of his household. He returns home to be intellectually superior to his elders, and may eventually wish to dominate the household, or he may move away to become a specialist in some new line of work. There are those who remain integral members of their household, use their new abilities to augment its economy, and participate as much as possible in its traditional affairs. Others appear to forget their household's claim on them and become independent. Such are subject to

general criticism from the Meo population.

Wage labor is part of the problem. The household has attempted to meet the need for cash through endeavors in which the entire household participates, e.g., the opium complex, raising and selling surplus products, and other communal projects. The communal endeavors reinforce the regular social pattern of the Meo, but the wage labor and individual specialization of labor tend to put strain on the framework of Meo social structure.

Political change has not caused severe hardship on the household, but it stands as a threat to the household's stability. If free elections lead an individual to place confidence and respect in those who traditionally do not warrant such, some instability may develop in the present social system. One can observe individuals who no longer sense responsibility within the household, and while they are considered as deviants, such an attitude may mean the beginning of a trend to which new political developments have made their contribution.

Despite the changes in Meo culture there is still little intermarriage between the Meo and the other ethnic groups. The Meo appear to want to maintain recognition and distinction as a group, and this desire seems to be realized even in the changing situations. It would seem that despite the stresses, the configuration of the Meo cultural pattern has been enlarged but not severely altered in taking on new elements. They appear to be ready to adopt new techniques and methods if, by doing so, the entire Meo society can benefit and gain prominence.

Perhaps this is a revitalization movement as Wallace defines it: "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."[19] The Meo appear to be competing consciously for recognition in many phases of life, political, economic, occupational, and educational

Recognition of this group loyalty by the federal government is obvious. The government views this Meo attitude with some apprehension, and has recently had cause for such alarm. This is admittedly the reason why the government has prohibited the printing of any material in the Meo language; it feared that having their own written language might be the capstone to the strong in-group feeling of the Meo, thus destroying all hope of forming a national unity that would cross ethnic barriers.

FOOTNOTES

1 See John Embree and Lillian Dotson, Bibliography of the Peoples and Cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia. In this book these people are listed as the Miao in the "Tribes" sections under Thailand and China and as the Meo in the "Tribes" sections under Laos and Vietnam.

2 Ibid., p. 803.

3 Ibid., p. 752.

4 Ibid., p. 549.

5 Ibid., p. 460.

6 Hugo Bernatzik, Akha und Meau: Probleme der angewandten Voelkerkunde in Hinterindien, Vol. I, Chapters 2-3.

7 Henri Roux, "Quelques Minorités Ethniques du Nord Indo-Chine," France-Asie, Vol. X, p. 388.

8 See maps in Appendix.

9 Roux, op. cit., p. 387.

10 William A. Smalley, "The Gospel and the Cultures of Laos," Practical Anthropology, Vol. III, No. 3, 1956, p. 50.

11 The Meo of Xieng Khouang are of two major dialects. The "white Meo," "mon tleu," are known by the clear white pleated skirts worn by the women. The "striped Meo," "mon len," are associated with the colorfully embroidered skirts worn by their women. The two dialects are mutually intelligible. The Meo language is largely monosyllabic, contains 53 consonant phonemes, 13 vowel phonemes (9 simple vowels and 4 vowel clusters) and 7 tone phonemes.

12 Bernatzik, op. cit., Chs. 2,6.

13 John Embree, "A Visit to Laos, French Indochina," Journal of the Washington Academy of Science, Vol. 39, 1949, p. 155.

14 "There are the very old songs which are almost exclusively Chinese in form, and there is much the same for the words of ritual in the sacrifices." F. H. Savina, "Dictionnaire Miao-Tseu-Français," Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, p. III.

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13 John Embree, "A Visit to Laos, French Indochina," Journal of the Washington Academy of Science, Vol. 39, 1949, p. 155.

14 "There are the very old songs which are almost exclusively Chinese in form, and there is much the same for the words of ritual in the sacrifices." F. H. Savina, "Dictionnaire Miao-Tseu-Français," Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, p. III.

15 The writer's actual knowledge of Meo folklore is limited. Few actually know the entire folklore. Pages of text were finally secured, but the evacuation of Xieng Khouang took place before hardly any translation of the text had been made. The very rare vocabulary defies translation now.

16 The writer is using a Meo term, Tu ua neng for a person who functions as a religious practitioner in Meo society. The terms "shaman" and "sorcerer" do not seem to fit the role as the writer observed it. for similar purposes, the Meo word Tlan is used in place of "spirits."

17 See above footnote.

18 A sacrifice may be anything from a chicken to a buffalo or cow. It may be determined by the wealth of the household, the prestige of the sick person, etc. Usually a chicken is first offered, and larger sacrifices will follow if necessary.

19 Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," American Anthropologist, Vol. 58, No. 2, April, 1956, p. 265.